

Sean Manning, *Armed Force in the Teispid-Achaemenid Empire: Past Approaches, Future Prospects*, (*Oriens et Occidens* – 32), Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2021, pp. 437; ISBN 978-3-515-12775-2

The image of the Achaemenid army that survives to this day has been shaped by testimonies of Greek authors writing on the Greco-Persian wars of the 5th and 4th c. BCE. From the 19th c. onwards, the said testimonies and data found within capture the attention of scholars, constantly stir up major controversies and remain open to reinterpretation. New research methods in philology, history and archaeology challenge the scholarly consensus on the Achaemenid military history, open new research avenues and produce newer, exacter data. Although the voluminous research on the Persian army comprises scores of articles, treatises and monographs, the scholars continue to discuss its makeup, organisational structure and operation. One scholar who reinterprets the available evidence and questions commonly held beliefs is Sean Manning, whose monograph, *Armed Force in the Teispid-Achaemenid Empire: Past Approaches, Future Prospects* (an expanded version of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Innsbruck, 2018), is the subject of this review.

Crucially, the monograph in question does not concern wars waged by the Achaemenids; instead, its focus lies on the land army of Persia under the Teispids and Achaemenids. The author excluded the navy due to his unfamiliarity with this topic.¹ What distinguishes Manning's perspective is his conscious shift of perspective: since the majority of scholars employ chiefly Greek sources on the Persian military, they inherit Greek cognitive biases. Manning proposes to paint a more comprehensive picture of the Persian army: first, to consider Greek, Persian and Babylonian sources side-by-side; second, to re-examine the image of the army in the sources through the lens of historical traditions that shaped it. The author underscores that the majority of scholars ignore the Persian's army embedment in the Eastern (non-Greek) military culture. To consider this army solely from the perspective of Greek sources and cultural codes will misinterpret peculiarities of the Persian culture (cf. pp. 61–63).

The reviewed monograph, comprising seven chapters, is capped with a sizeable works cited section (pp. 359–415) and five indices.² The first chapter ('A History of Research,' pp. 21–64) surveys the history of research on the Achaemenid army, from the very first publications in the 19th c. up to the dissertation's completion in 2018. The author traces the evolution of main research trends in the studied interval and characterises key approaches.

¹ 'This is a study of the role of armed force in the Teispid-Achaemenid empire, not a history of particular military operations' (p. 63).

² Index of Assyriological Sources Cited (pp. 417–419); Index of Biblical Sources Cited (p. 419); Index of Classical Sources Cited (pp. 419–423); Index of Words in Ancient Languages (pp. 423–424); Index of Persons, Places, and Technical Terms (pp. 425–437).

Seasoned researchers of the Achaemenid military will be able to situate their own perspective apropos other developments in the field, whereas newcomers will gain an understanding of the *status questionis* and choose own avenues of research.

The second chapter ('The Ancestors of the Achaemenid Armies,' pp. 65–114) discusses the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian foundations of the Persian army. The author examines armies of Mesopotamian states before the Persian conquest: economic and social aspects of raising armies, unit types, combat styles, arms production technologies, organisational structure and operation.

The third chapter ('Kings at War: The Perspective of the Royal Inscriptions,' pp. 115–154) considers perceptions of every Persian king: their role in waging wars, their self-presentation in the sources and their ideological stances on war, as recorded in Persian (the Cyrus Cylinder, the Behistun Inscriptions, the Nagš-e Rostam Inscriptions) and Babylonian sources, in the Bible and iconographical sources. The author highlights that, unlike the Greek accounts, the Persian sources never openly state that the Achaemenids pursued a policy of expansion or overtly sought to conquer as many lands as possible (cf. pp. 153–154).

In the following chapter ('Commoners at War: the Perspective of Letters and Documents,' pp. 155–221), the author analyses Babylonian and Aramaic documents on Persian soldiers found at excavation sites. Even though many scholars of Mesopotamia and the Achaemenids have already considered the data found in these documents, the Classically-oriented scholars remain by and large unaware of their significance. The said documents yield data on recruitment methods in Mesopotamia, conditions of military service, the soldiers' ethnic origin, and unit and arms types; furthermore, they shed light on the complex and elusive image of relations between different types of land armies serving in the Persian war machine. All these data, recorded in documents by local administration, represent a particularly valuable and trustworthy source, in comparison to more general and less reliable Greek accounts.

The fifth chapter ('Material Remains: The Perspective of Archaeology,' pp. 223–259) pits written testimonies on Achaemenid armament types against archaeological finds. The studies on Persian arms remain inchoate due to no established research methods and difficulties in ascertaining the origin of studied artefacts (with various arm types copied, produced and used in regions far away from their point of origin). The surviving textual and visual depictions of Persian arms, although significant, do not yield looked-for data more typical of archaeological finds, such as material, weight, size, production methods, etc. (cf. pp. 252–256). Unfortunately, the above mentioned difficulties limit the potential of warfare archaeology in Persia.³


³ 'Archaeology created the central problem of Achaemenid Studies: how can the picture in the classical literary sources and the Bible be reconciled with that in cuneiform texts and grave goods? Without archaeological fieldwork, these other bodies of evidence would remain unknown. However, broad works in the field tend to be written by scholars focused on texts or art as sources. The barriers to archaeological work are certainly formidable, including civil war, shortages of funds, and difficulty dating finds, and the high standards of documentation in modern excavations encourage archaeologists to focus on small areas over clearing whole sites. However, a glance at the study of war in two other ancient cultures suggests what an archaeological perspective on armed force might add' (p. 257).

The sixth (and the longest) chapter considers the image of the Persian army in works of Greek authors ('Greek Literature, and the Army in Action,' pp. 261–347). Although the chapter abounds in details on the Persian military organisational structure and arms, the Greek authors' interests lay in wars, campaigns and battles. However, the wealth of detail in their testimonies may pose problems in case of ambiguity, with these texts becoming open to multiple interpretations. Moreover, the prevailing scholarly focus on wars, battles and other singular events in the Persian war studies excludes many other issues, some of them related to research methods and biases.

In the final chapter ('Conclusion and Future Research,' pp. 349–358), the author proposes some future avenues of research on the Persian army. His concluding statement stresses the need for combining multiple research methods and perspectives, including Greek and Eastern sources, and appreciating the Eastern substratum in the Achaemenid Empire, linking this state to its predecessors.

The preceding survey of S. Manning's monograph highlights its originality against earlier analyses on organisation and operation of the Achaemenid army. The author's exceptional treatment of the Persian military has no precedents in the literature on this subject. Not only did he include a variety of Eastern sources (a novel approach) but he also carefully analysed research methods and their biases, showing blind spots in earlier studies on the Persian army and opening up new directions for research. Some readers of S. Manning's work may not agree with his views and interpretations, so very different from the scholarly consensus. Their disagreement notwithstanding, S. Manning's original work is a novel, methodologically-astute and eye-opening contribution to the studies on the Persian army, the work for which one has to applaud the author.

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